

The Doctoral School of History and the Department of History cordially invite you to the

Public Defense of the Doctoral Thesis in
History

by

Uku Lember

on

**Silenced Ethnicity: Russian-Estonian Intermarriages in Soviet
Estonia (Oral History)**

will be held on

Thursday, October 30, 2014 at 15:00

in the

**Senate room
Central European University (CEU)
Budapest—1051
Nádor 9**

Defense Committee

Chair: András Bozóki, Department of Political Science CEU

Supervisor: Marsha Siefert, Department of History, CEU

Members: Karl Hall, Department of History, CEU

Ene Kõresaar (University of Tartu)

Reader: Adrienne Edgar (University of California at Santa Barbara)

Dissertation abstract

The number of Russian-speakers grew from 4% (in 1945) to 35% (in 1989) in Soviet Estonia. This created a situation in which the society was divided by the parallel Estonian-Russian school system and widespread linguistic segregation into two social spaces that are described as two “cultural worlds” in the dissertation. However, these cultural worlds were inhabited by the diverse socio-economic groups of people and in different circumstances; it is therefore also shown in the thesis that individuals had various paths for socialisation and identification within, across and beyond these cultural worlds. This study discusses ethno-cultural cohabitation of Estonians and Russian-speakers in Soviet Estonia with a focus on the ways in which the social tensions were accommodated in family.

This dissertation is based on the oral history interviews with spouses and children from inter-marriages of “newcomer Russians” and “local Estonians.” Hence, it focuses on the families that stand nominally “in-between” the Russian and Estonian cultural worlds. The author conducted 95 life-story interviews from spring 2009 to summer 2011. Data from 50 interviews is primarily used in the dissertation as most attention is given to the inter-married spouses who were born from 1930s to 1950s and their children who were born from 1950s to 1970s.

Two main arguments are put forward in the dissertation. First, the author discusses the division of the Soviet Estonian society into two linguistically marked Russian and Estonian “cultural worlds.” These worlds offered intermingled but distinct “reservoirs” of ethnic, political, historical and other meaning constellations and past-future horizons. (Therefore, these worlds are not described as “ethnic worlds” even though they were sometimes ethnicized.) The author argues that the Estonian and Russian cultural worlds maintained a balance and parity in Soviet Estonia by both offering attractive and diverse ways for individual identification. Russian world offered more diverse and ambiguous identifications, for example, it was imbued with contradictory meanings of local inferiority and imperial arrogance, its references went beyond Russian ethnic culture towards the other cultures in the USSR. Russian world also carried the discourse of Soviet power and civic identity. The patterns for individual identification were narrower in the Estonian world as they were more tightly related to the Estonian ethnic culture; however, among the working class and the people born after the war, many appeared to be quite accommodative to the civic identifications in reference to the Soviet state.

Second argument in the dissertation is about cultural identification of individuals in inter-marriages. It is shown that the socio-cultural conflict was actualised in multiple ways depending on concrete people, context and circumstances. However, most generally references to the conflict were quite absent from the discussions and debates within inter-marriages. On the one hand, the relevance of such conflicts was reduced in family life. This was especially the case when some family members

would potentially identify with the incommensurable ethnic, historical or political patterns. In the absence of the discursive tools for “discussing things through” de-emphasizing controversies – either more consciously or intuitively – was a practical solution. On the other hand, lack of discussions and debates about the socio-cultural conflict in the family also indicated the absence of identifications with the conflictual patterns in everyday life. In this case, the tensions between the two cultural worlds were not personally experienced and perceived by the people in inter-marriages. This points to an alternative constructive way of living together by not identifying with the forces that pull the society (and potentially the marriage) apart. In addition to these perspectives, the author argued that the culturally conflictual tropes in inter-marriage setting could be understood by distinguishing between their performative and constative dimensions. Even if people “performed” repetitive affirmations and utterances of their ethno-cultural belonging they did not actually invest in the “constative” meanings that accompanied such repetitions in everyday life.

The main arguments of the dissertation – about the parity of Estonian and Russian cultural worlds and about the lack of conflictual identifications in inter-marriages – point to the plurality in personal patterns of socialization and cultural identification in the Soviet Estonia from the 1960s onwards. This plurality was largely thanks to the co-existence of different historical generations and Estonian and Russian cultural worlds. In general terms, older “Estonian locals” were strongly nationally-minded; older “Russian newcomers” were potentially inhabiting aspects of Soviet subjectivity in addition to ethnicized patterns; the younger locals and newcomers possessed identifications with ethnicity and also with the wider Soviet world and the perspective of Soviet future. (Estonian locals tended more towards nationalism and Russia newcomers towards Soviet identification patterns). In addition, these identifications were largely situational and depended on contextual cues. Family played an important role in transmitting and negotiating old meanings with the new circumstances. In the period from the 1960s to early 1980s (during late Socialism) in Soviet Estonia people had access to different layers of identification, such as public ideological discourse and ethnicized cultural immersion.

* * *

The composition of the dissertation is based on two parallel modes of representation. For one, it describes life-worlds and family-stories throughout the chapters as different episodes of the same families accumulate. For two, the thematic structure of the chapters is based on the topical clusters that emerged from a close reading of life-story transcripts. The first chapter serves as an introduction to eleven inter-cultural marriages through the stories of the encounters of the spouses. These open some lines of diversity that were explored further in the dissertation (different birth cohorts, living places, social backgrounds, and gendered patterns). The people here introduced appear also in the later parts of the thesis and create a possibility for a more holistic portrait of the life-worlds of these families.

In the second and third chapter I apply a more general approach to the divide of Russian-Estonian cultural worlds. The second chapter is focused on how the different places of living – capital Tallinn, Estonian-speaking Tartu, and Russian-speaking Eastern Estonia – influenced cultural identifications. I noted that the perception of others and oneself appeared more ethnicized for “local Estonians” and more multiple and diverse for “newcomer Russians.” As for specific localities, working class and intellectual Russian-speakers shared only a few commonalities in Tartu and had even less contact with the people in Eastern Estonia. Estonians shared more identifications across places, but social class and generational differences appeared among them strongly, as well.

The third chapter is about the shifting temporal frames with a focus on the two tense and difficult periods in the 20th century Estonian history: the period of Stalinism (1940/44-1953) and the Singing Revolution (1988-92). I argued that Estonian and Russian cultural worlds stood most apart during these periods as the images of the “Other” were strongly ethnicized and politized. However, these times were experienced asymmetrically: people in the Estonian world experienced profound cultural changes during Stalinism and people in the Russian world were shattered by the Singing Revolution and its aftermath. Many Russian-speakers shared the difficulties of Stalinism and that the same was the case with Estonians at the collapse of the USSR.

The last three chapters move closer to the family environment and individual identifications. The fourth chapter discusses intermarriages as microcosms of negotiating the larger cultural worlds. I look at the relatives' reactions and also everyday life in inter-marriages during late socialism and the Singing Revolution. I argue that Estonian mothers-in-law were often vocally against inter-marriages, they demonstrated worries about the inter-generational transmission of Estonian cultural world and their own negative experiences with Stalinist Sovietization. In this light, the families on the “Russian side” were more accommodating to Estonian spouses. With regard to the everyday life in inter-marriages, I argued that the cultural worlds were not experienced as divisive, the controversial and conflictual topics were normally not actualised within inter-marriages. Gendered family roles appeared more important in family dynamics as fathers were quite absent from family life and from taking care of children. The Singing Revolution (1988-92) is a good example here. As the public political and increasingly ethnicized discourse grew tenser at that time most spouses continued not discussing the conflict at home. However, when someone strongly identified with one side in the public conflict, then it often led to incommensurable familial arguments (and also to some divorces, but only in the cases of pre-existing inter-personal tensions.)

The fifth chapter discusses some specific topoi of cultural identification that arose from the life-story interviews. It looks at how personal names acted as markers of cultural belonging both “from outside” by the others and “from inside” for the carriers of names. It discusses how the Soviet “passport ethnicity,” an assigned external category, was a latent and unimportant nominator for people, but how “passport ethnicity” did influence understandings of personal cultural belonging.

The chapter also looks at belonging and estrangement experiences of the children from intermarriages at school. I argue that cultural identifications in Estonian-language schools were closely tied to Estonian ethnicity, but, in contrast, the children in Russian-schools often felt genuinely “in-between” in their relationships to the Russian and Estonian cultural worlds.

The sixth and last chapter takes a closer look at the contingencies of the past in relation to cultural belonging in the last decades of the Soviet Estonia from a perspective of inter-generational transmission of cultural worlds in family. This quite extensive chapter moves between individual perspectives, comparative case studies, and generational themes. It asks how the inter-married parents (b. late 1920s – 1930s) communicated their knowledge about the first half of the 20th century and familial past to their children (b. 1950s – early 1960s). In the majority of families in the study, no repressive events had taken place in past; people rather referred to “general difficulties” and “hard times” in family history. I characterise such stories as discourses about the “difficulty of life in past.” This discourse corresponds to the lived experiences of the former generations, to the Soviet frames of talking about the past, and it would also reconcile conflictual interpretations of the past in the Russian and Estonian worlds. I argued that parents (b. 1920-30s) used the past to establish a liveable normality in the Soviet present with the prospect of a Soviet future in mind, as a result the children (b. 1950-60s) were socialised essentially into the Soviet reality and they felt fairly comfortable in it. In addition, had there been Stalinist repressions in the family, they were normally not discussed with children, but less due to the fears and more due to considering such information not useful for the future. During late Socialism, the memories of repressive past were on their way of losing cultural significance also in the Estonian world, even if repressions were temporally and spatially closer than was the case with the Russian world.

UKU LEMBER

Kingu 23, Saku, 75501 Estonia
lembur.uku@gmail.com

RESEARCH INTERESTS

- Oral History and Anthropological Methods
- Eastern Europe and Russia in 20th Century
- History of Ethnicity and Nationalism
- History of Socialism
- Social and Cultural History

EDUCATION

Central European University (Budapest, Hungary) 09.2007 – present
PhD program in Comparative History of Central, Southeastern and Eastern Europe
PhD dissertation: “Silenced Ethnicity”: Russian-Estonian Intermarriages in Soviet Estonia (Oral History)”

Central European University (Budapest, Hungary) 09.2006 – 06.2007
MA degree in **Central European History**, *with distinction*, GPA 3.94 (4-point scale)
MA Thesis: “Domesticating the Soviet regime: Autobiographic Experiences of the “Post-War” Generation in Estonia”

University of Tartu (Estonia) 09.1999 – 06.2005
BA degree in **Economics and Business Administration**, *cum laude*, GPA 4.8 (5-point scale). Specialisation: Finance and Portuguese language. BA Thesis: “Corporate Social Responsibility, Socially Responsible Investments, and their relations to Financial Results. (In Estonia and elsewhere)”

University of Coimbra (Portugal) 09.2001 – 06.2002
Annual Course of Portuguese Language and Culture (intermediate level)
Recipient of the *Instituto Camões* scholarship. “A” grades.

Tallinn Secondary Science School 09.1996 – 06.1999
A-level graduation exams: History 99%, English 94%, Physics 96%
Finished with the highest grades only (*golden medal*)

VISITING FELLOWSHIPS

Cornell University (Ithaca, NY USA) 09.2011 – 06.2012
Telluride Association Reese Miller Visiting Scholar

Tartu University (Estonia) 11.2012 – 03.2012
DoRa T5 visiting PhD student fellowship

Tallinn University (Estonia) 01.2011 – 06.2011
DoRa T5 visiting PhD student fellowship

Tbilisi State University (Georgia) 10.2008 – 12.2008
Exchange fellowship for the study of Russian language.

OTHER SCHOLARSHIPS

- Association for the Advancement of Baltic Studies (AABS). Grant for completion of PhD research. (2012-13)
- CEU competitive grants for participation in conferences in the UK (September 2008), Sweden (July 2010), Argentina (August 2012).
- External scholarships from respective organisations for participating in the following summer schools: Flying University of Transnational Humanities: “Borders (I) - Regions and Regionalisation,” (11-16 June 2010, Hanyang University, Seoul, Korea); European Sociological Association Summer School (28 Aug - 1 Sept 2009, Lisbon, Portugal); European University Institute History Summer School (14-18 Sept 2008, Florence, Italy).
- External scholarships from respective associations for participating at conferences and workshops: American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies (ASEEES Davies Travel Grant, 2014); International Oral History Association (2014; 2010), Association for the Advancement of Baltic Studies (AABS, 2012).
- Fellowship of the US State Department International Visitor Leadership Program: A Project for Young European Leaders on Current Social, Political, and Economic Issues. (Incl. meetings and workshops with different US state and civil society representatives in 5 different states. 17 Sept – 5 Oct 2007.)
- Alumni scholarship for social and extra-curricular activities in the Central European University during MA studies. (2006-07)
- Scholarship of the Estonian Students Fund in the USA for studies in Estonia (March 2006).
- Diploma at the National Competition of Research Papers of Estonian Students in 2005, by The Estonian Ministry of Education and Research (March 2005)
- Olympia scholarship for the participation at the Alternative Investments Summer Camp at the EDHEC Business School in Nice, France (July 2005).

PUBLICATIONS AND CONFERENCES

Peer Reviewed Articles

- “Inter-generational Transmission of Pasts in late Soviet Estonia: Oral History Perspective in Inter-marriage Setting.” In: *Generational Perspectives on Sociocultural Transformations*, ed. by Anu Kannike, Raili Nugin, Maaris Raudsepp. Tartu: Tartu University Press, forthcoming in Spring 2015.
- “Corporate Social Responsibility and Socially Responsible Investments in the Perception of Estonian Institutional Investors.” *EBS Review* 20, “Leadership Ethics and Social Responsibility.” Autumn-winter 2005.

Book Reviews:

- Kirss, Tiina. Ed. and transl. *Estonian Life Stories*. Budapest: CEU Press, 2009. In: *East Central Europe* 38 (2011): 393-395.
- Kõresaar, Ene. Ed. *Soldiers of Memory: World War II and Its Aftermath in Estonian Post-Soviet Life Stories*. Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2011. In: *Forschungen zur baltischen Geschichte* 7 (2012): 285-290.

Selected conference presentations:

- “Identity Formation of the Children from the 'Russian'-'Estonian' Marriages in Soviet Estonia (1950-70s): Evidence from Oral Histories. In: Conference on “Intermarriage through History”, 5-8 June 2013, Centre for Population Studies, Babes Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania.
- “Having a “Normal” Life in the ESSR: Biographical Experiences of Inter-Ethnic Marriage Situations.” In: 23rd Biannual Conf. of the Association for the Advancement of Baltic Studies (AABS), 26-28 April 2012, University of Illinois, Chicago, USA.

- “Some Strange Patterns in Negotiation and Transmission of Family Pasts in the Inter-Ethnic Marriages in Soviet Estonia.” In: World Convention of the Association of the Study of Nationalities (ASN). 19-21 April 2012, Columbia University, New York City, USA.
- “A Biographical Approach to the Entanglement of two Life-Worlds: ‘Estonian’-‘Russian’ Intermarriages in the Soviet and Contemporary Estonia.” In: 17th ISA World Congress of Sociology: “Sociology on the Move,” 11-17 July 2010, Gothenburg, Sweden.
- “Soviet Estonian Post-War Generation: Material and Humanist Values as Alternative to Politically Charged Life Narratives.” In: 16th International Oral History Conference: “Between Past and Future: Oral History, Memory and Meaning,” 7-11 July 2010, Prague, Czech Republic.
- “‘Estonian’-‘Russian’ cultural encounters ‘from below’ in Post-Stalinist Soviet Estonia (1957-1987).” In: International Society for Cultural History Annual Conference 2010: “Cultural Histories: Close Readings, Critical Syntheses,” 26-30 May 2010, University of Turku, Finland.

OTHER ACADEMIC ACTIVITIES

Professional memberships

- American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies (AAASS) since 2008
- Association for the Advancement of Baltic Studies (AABS) since 2008
- International Oral History Association (IOHA) since 2014
- Research Committee on Biography and Society of International Sociological Association (ISA) since 2010

Organisational activities

- Coordinator of the organisation committee for Graduate Conference in European History (GRACEH 2010) in Budapest 6-9 May 2010 titled, “Biography and Identity: Dilemmas and Opportunities” with 45 participants. Coordinated also a successful application and administration of a bid for external financing from *Gerda Henkel Foundation*.
- Student initiator of the scholarly-social meetings of the Department of History in CEU from spring 2008 (formerly, now departmental student-professor colloquia took place).

Teaching

- MA-seminar at Tallinn University “Stalinism in the USSR.” 2014 autumn semester (co-teaching).
- Tallinn University seminar series of “Historical Methods” and Tartu University seminar series on “Ethnographic Methods. 2013 spring. Guest seminars on oral history.
- BA/MA seminar at Tallinn University “Post-Stalinist USSR 1953–1991.” 2011 spring semester (co-teaching).
- CEU seminar: “Elites, Social Mobility and Stratification Feudalism to Socialism. Problem Areas and Research Methods.” Winter-spring 2010. (teaching assistant)
- BA-course Tartu University. “Business Management”. Worked with 2 groups, each 30 people. Winter-spring 2006. (Seminar leader and homework supervisor).

Languages

English – fluent	French – basic skills
Russian – good conversation and writing	Spanish – basic skills
Portuguese – good conversation, basic writing	Estonian – native

OTHER WORK AND VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE

Telluride Association (USA) – Board Member, Overseas Exchange Committee	since June 2012
President of AIESEC in Estonia (full time work)	07.2003 – 06.2004

- Vice-President of AIESEC in Estonia, on External Relations and Finance (full time) 07.2002 – 06.2003
- Non-Formal Trainer in the „Youth” Program Estonian Office (part time) 08.2003 – 05.2005
- Student representative and active involvement in positions in NGOs 1.2004 – 06.2008
- CEU: Student Union Assembly (2006-08); SUA Management Board and CEU Senate (stud. rep.) (2007-08).
 - Tartu University: Student Council and chair of SC Revision Commission; Supervisory Board of the University of Tartu (stud. rep.); Council of Federation of Estonian Student Unions (all in 2005-06).
 - Supervisory Board of the Network of Estonian Non-Governmental Organisations (06.2004 – 05.2007).
 - Financial Revision Commissions: Estonian Youth Council (chair, 05.2004 – 05.2006); Federation of Estonian Student Unions (02.2006 – 01.2007); AIESEC in Estonia (07.2005 – 05.2007).